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OL'HA WOYCENKO

**CANADA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE:
UKRAINIAN CONTRIBUTION**



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ОЛЬГА ВОЙЦЕНКО

**ВКЛАД УКРАЇНЦІВ У КУЛЬТУРУ
КАНАДИ**

Вінніпер

1964

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

At the annual meeting of the Provincial Council of Women which took place in Winnipeg Nov. 14—15, 1963, a symposium on Canada's Cultural Heritage was held. The panelists were Dr. P. T. Thorlakson (Icelandic), Mrs. Joyce R. Penner (Mennonite), Mrs. Ol'ha Woycenko (Ukrainian) and Mrs. D. M. Robertson (United Kingdom); the latter chaired the symposium. The panelists presented their particular group's contribution to Canada's cultural pattern. In the following we are publishing the paper delivered by Ol'ha Woycenko.

In publishing Mrs. Woycenko's paper, UVAN hopes to make it readily available to all those interested in the Canadian multicultural reality and particularly in the contribution of Ukrainian Canadians to its contemporary pattern.

In to-day's discussion on *Canada's Cultural Heritage*, I shall attempt to present the contribution made by Canadians of Ukrainian descent in developing and enriching Canada's cultural life.

Before I begin, however, I would like, without exaggeration, to stress the fact that Canada is a wonderful country to live in, to work in, to develop and expand in, both materially and spiritually. Its potentials are boundless. It could easily be referred to as the Biblical land of "milk and honey." Alas! The bountiness of the land and freedom which we enjoy are often taken for granted, at times there seems to be no awareness of this reality, and if we are aware, it is not always appreciated.

Canada opened her doors to settlers from different lands of diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds. She offered freedom to these people, not only in a physical sense, but spiritual as well, and allowed them to preserve and cultivate their own particular heritage, that is, their own language, customs and traditions. By doing so, Canada herself became richer, and that is why Canada to-day is considered unique amongst the countries on the American continent. As a result, we have priceless spiritual treasures within our boundaries. Will we have the wisdom and the foresight not only to preserve what we already have, but to continue to create a conducive atmosphere for further cultivation and growth?

In the past and at times in the present, gloomy and pessimistic voices are heard, rumbling to the effect that once a newcomer chooses Canada for his new and permanent home, all ties with his past should be severed. We would agree with this contention when one's loyalties in a political sense are questioned. Once a newcomer adopts Canada as his new and permanent place of abode and accepts citizenship, his allegiance must be to Canada only. He should be fully

aware of his responsibilities and duties as a citizen of Canada, and he should know that politically he must be loyal to this country only, no matter what his ethnic or cultural background may have been before his coming to Canada. However, when it comes to the delicate matter of one's cultural heritage — it is a more complex problem. The problems of assimilation and integration have been looked into, studied and widely discussed by scholars. Volumes of books have been written on the subject. I cannot go into detail here nor is there time to quote authorities in this respect, but the dominant opinion of the specialists seems to be, that the process of gradual integration is most desirable. It is a slow process, often unnoticeable, as it is a rather "give and take" procedure. One bestows and at the same time accepts, and in the end, the result is most fruitful and rewarding for both parties concerned.

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Canadians of Ukrainian descent form the largest ethnic group of Slavic origin in this country, totalling more than all the other Slavic groups combined. According to the census of 1961, there are nearly half a million Ukrainians in Canada. Traces of Ukrainian immigration to Canada go back as far as 1874. The influx of mass immigration began in the 1890s.

The cultural contribution of this group of people could be classed into three main categories: material, social and spiritual.

The material culture embraces: church architecture; sculpture; visual arts; handicrafts, especially embroideries; the culinary arts: agriculture and horticulture. I will begin with this first category — material.

We do not have to travel across Canada for examples to illustrate our theory of cultural integration, or, as someone preferred to call it, creative adaptability. We have some very fine examples in the city of Winnipeg, the city which is often referred to as the capital of Ukrainians in Canada.

The oldest type of Ukrainian Church buildings erected in Canada were the Byzantine tri-cupola, or "onion" - domed

edifices, the designs of which were simply transplanted from the old country to Canada. Such churches could be seen in North Winnipeg and throughout Canada. Except for such modern additions as plumbing, electricity, etc., they could be classed as absolute imports, dating, as far as design is concerned, centuries back. As time went by, modification took place, and in later buildings there are characteristics that are more in keeping with the prevailing style, although a good deal of the old traditional design was incorporated into them. The result? — a sort of an architectural hybrid structure, It is neither old in form, nor new in design, nor is it aesthetically appealing. Only very recently, due to the individual efforts and talents of such architects, as Prof. Radoslav Zuk of the University of Manitoba, church buildings have been erected, which are modern in design, adapted to time, space and terrain, and yet, incorporating into their structures the traditional elements such as tridomes, etc. This type of structure is not only ultramodern, but it forms a highly artistic synthesis of both — the Ukrainian past and Canadian present. (An example is the recently built church on Grant Avenue, Winnipeg.)

An almost parallel evolution in integration and adaptation may be seen in all forms of handicrafts which have been made here.

The settlers brought to Canada all kinds of handicrafts. There was a strong desire amongst them not only to preserve the age old crafts but to continue developing them in their new environment. Out of sheer necessity the crafts had to be adapted to the practical needs of the settler's new way of life in this country, utilizing material which was more available here, yet incorporating age old traditional designs and patterns. This evolution is quite evident in illustrations shown in the book *Ukrainian Embroidery Designs and Stitches* published by the Ukrainian Women's Ass'n. of Canada. Incidentally, this organization contributed very much to revive interest in the crafts, as there was a period, when it seemed the art will disappear or degenerate to an undesirable hybrid variety. We are happy that interest in the crafts have

not only been revived but are flourishing more than ever. There is fourth generation of Canadians of Ukrainian descent mastering the crafts; some of them turn out flawless pieces of embroidery and weaving which are not only unique additions to the modern decor of their homes, but they also incorporate them into certain styles of wearing apparel, especially women's and children's costumes and accessories. Some examples are shown in the book on embroideries already mentioned here.

An amazing interest in other crafts has recently been noted, e. g., easter egg painting, wood carving, weaving.

The culinary aspect of the arts went through a remarkable process of evolution, the culmination of which was the publication of the book, *Traditional Ukrainian Cookery* by Savella Stechishin. The age old recipes were adapted to ingredients which are available here in Canada, and techniques, familiar to this country's way of preparation and cooking, were adopted.

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Ukrainian artists, sculptors, architects are contributing to the development of the arts in Canada. Leo Mol of Winnipeg is one example. Peter Dobush, an outstanding architect, born and educated in Winnipeg, now practising in Montreal, should be mentioned. Both, Mr. Mol and Mr. Dobush received national recognition in 1960 when they were awarded medals by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada for outstanding achievements in their specific fields. Then there is Helen Kohuska, one of the Canadian born artists who studied abroad and brought a new spirit to the Ukrainian artistic creativity. Taras Korol of Winnipeg is called upon continuously to project stage sets, design costumes, etc., in connection with the various theatrical productions. A number of postwar emigre artists, such as Vadym Dobrolige (Edmonton), D. Dmytrenko (Toronto), S. Hordynskyj (Winnipeg) have left their artistic marks on the decor of many church and public buildings in Canada. And the modern graphic designs of Myron Levyckyj are greatly contributing

to the aesthetic appearance of book covers and publications in general.

Classes in drawing and painting for children and young adults have been conducted by Kateryna Antonovych for over a decade in the halls of the Ukrainian National Home in Winnipeg. Herself, a talented artist, Madam Antonovych is accomplishing wonders with the young aspiring artists. This is quite evident at the school's annual exhibits. But, more important, due to her untiring efforts, her enthusiasm and eagerness to share her talents and artistic techniques with her pupils, she has inspired a number of them to pursue their studies in institutions of higher learning, here and abroad. One of her pupils, Daria Zelska-Darevych, a graduate of the University of Manitoba, chose for her thesis — ancient designs of Ukrainian ceramics. To-day, Mrs. Darevych and other former pupils of this school are contributing to the artistic life of the country as teachers, designers, painters, etc.

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An important Ukrainian contribution has been in the field of horti-and agriculture. It is well known that in the early days of immigration, a large percent of the newcomers from Ukraine settled on the virgin lands of Western Canada, and, "in the sweat of the brow" broke and cultivated the land. But not all of us are aware of the fact that certain species and varieties of flora (decorative - ornamental as well as edible — fruit, cereal and vegetable), quite common now in Canada, owe their cultivation and growth here to these settlers, who brought the seeds from their former homeland and painstakingly fostered their growth and reproduction. In this respect, some research has been made by the renowned horticulturists N. Pankiw of Dufrost, Man., and Prof. M. Borowskyj. The latter had articles published on this subject (Ukrainian Voice # 1, 1950, New Pathway # 205, 1949).

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The social aspects of a culture include colorful and symbolic customs of Holiday Festivities, such as Christmas Eve

celebrations, Easter and other holy day feasts. As these are celebrated according to the Julian Calendar (which is almost two weeks later than the Gregorian) the festivities are quite outstanding, especially in the prairie provinces, and have definitely become a part of the Canadian scene with special Radio and TV programs to mark the occasions.

Choral and group singing, as well as folk dancing are well known characteristics of Ukrainians. Every Canadian enjoys Ukrainian songs and dances, and one can hardly imagine a representative Canadian Festival of Song and Dances without the participation of one of these groups.

„Music to them is a necessity of living — not a frill — says J. F. C. Wright — and their vivid feeling for it has enriched the symphony and concert orchestras of Canada. In the Saskatoon Symphony are eight Ukrainians of the first and second generations born in Canada. In Winnipeg, Toronto and other cities they are in the string sections of many orchestras.”*)

Ukrainian theatrical art has a lengthy and bright tradition in Canada. In this field, drama was the first to find its expression in live presentations on the stage and in published form as well. In the period when hundreds of Ukrainian community halls mushroomed across the country, especially in the prairie provinces, the amateur theatrical groups were the core of these institutions. In the days before radio and television, these groups provided entertainment for people in villages, town and cities, thereby bringing diversion to their rather desolated life. Technological progress brought changes to both the urban and rural ways of life, and this, of course, had effected the theatrical groups as well. Nevertheless, though not great in number as in the past, there is to-day a number of theatrical ensembles, especially in the larger cities, that are perpetuating this old and fine tradition.

Due to such intense interest in drama, offsprings of these once amateur performers received professional training and

*) Canadian Geographical Journal, Vol. XXV, No. 2, August, 1942.

to-day, as accomplished artists, are contributing to the theatrical life in general. Some of them may be mentioned, as for instance, Cecil Semchyshyn, Orest Ulan, Joan Karasievich, Lesia Zubrak, "Juliette", and others.

Activity in this sphere inspired the writing and publishing of plays which too are part of the literary contribution of Ukrainians to Canada. In this respect Semen Kowbel, O. Luhowyj, D. Hunkevich could be named.

In the economic, professional and political life of the country, the Canadian Ukrainians have also made a substantial contribution. In the political field, they elected, or had been appointed, representatives at all levels of Government (mayors and reeves of cities and municipalities; members and ministers of Provincial legislatures; members and a minister in the Federal Parliament; members of the Senate; etc.).



The group's contribution to the spiritual culture of Canada is outstanding. The two traditional Churches — Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic contribute to the religious pattern of the Canadian community.

Research and scholarly activities are represented by a number of prominent scientists. The late Dr. T. K. Pavlychenko of the University of Saskatchewan was a world renowned ecologist; Dr. W. J. Cherewick, phytopathologist, currently with the Research Branch of the Federal Agricultural Department, are only two examples in these fields. Then there is the eminent biochemist Dr. Nestor Bohonos, formerly of Edmonton, Alta., now in New York, and Dr. H. Messel, world renowned physicist, formerly of Rivers, Man., now in Australia]. In the humanities we have had scholars here of Doroshenko's and Bileckyj's calibre. The learned societies, such as the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences with headquarters in Winnipeg, the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Toronto and others, continuously contribute to the enrichment and prestige of Canadian scholarship.

While the above contributions have been restricted to specialists in their respective disciplines, the Ukrainians in

Canada are very productive in the realm of letters, especially in poetry, including folk poetry, fiction, drama. The following authors could be mentioned: E. Kiriak (author of the monumental *Sons of the Soil* — a truly Western Pioneer Saga, recently translated into English by M. Luchkovich), M. I. Mandryka (author of the epic poem *Canada*), Honore Ewach, Myra Lazechko Haas, and others. The past few years have been very fruitful in the publication of biographies and memoirs, especially on the early years of settlement and adaptation in Canada. *Taking Root in Canada* by G. Romaniuk (published bilingually in English and Ukrainian) is one example.

A thick volume could be written on Ukrainian publications in Canada — newspapers, periodicals, journals. The Ukrainian press has a long and significant history in Canada. In 1963, the *Canadian Farmer* (published by the National Publishers Ltd., Winnipeg) celebrated its sixtieth anniversary of continuous publication. Not very far behind in time is the weekly *Ukrainian Voice*, continuously published since 1910, the *Herald* since 1924, *New Pathway* since 1933, etc., etc. A recent survey disclosed that Ukrainians in Canada, in the period since the second World War, published 222 periodicals.

Since 1953, Prof. J. B. Rudnyckyj has been annually compiling bibliographical surveys of all publications in Canada. This survey is published by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee in UVAN series: *Ukrainica Canadiana*. Currently he is working on a retrospective bibliography which would give the total number and titles of books and pamphlets published by Ukrainians in Canada. It is assumed that over 5,000 titles of them have been produced in the span of 60 years, since the first known book appeared in Canada in 1904. This output positively compares with other ethnic groups in Canada, including French and English. Further to this matter, I would like to quote from *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* (Toronto, Ont., 1962): "In dealing with Ukrainian Canadian bibliography one cannot avoid comparison with the bibliographies of other ethnic

groups in Canada. Together with English and French bibliographies of all kinds, Ukrainian efforts and publications in this field represent not only the most dynamic endeavour of any group of the so called "third element" in this country, but from an objective viewpoint constitute also a real contribution to the whole Canadian scene. It is to be hoped that the firmly established publications in this field will be continued and extended, thus enriching the Canadian cultural mosaic and serving as a basis for research on the part of generations to come."

As it can be noted, no specific reference to the Ukrainian language has so far been made in this survey. Nevertheless, the language has been in constant use since the arrival of the first settlers from Ukraine, and is still very much alive to-day as an important tool of communication of 361,496 Canadians (1961 census). It has been a uniting and unifying factor in the social and cultural life of Ukrainians and, at the present time is being used by the fourth generation, born and raised in Canada. As a significant cultural asset, the Ukrainian language in Canada has gained recognition in educational levels and is now taught in high-schools and universities and is regarded to-day, as is was in the past, not only an important tool of communication amongst the Ukrainians, but as a basic factor in the preservation and cultivation of their spiritual values.

However, it should be stressed at this point that some form of acceptance, or official recognition should be given the various languages spoken in Canada, if cultural diversity is to be continued. A pattern which actually exists, is generally acknowledged and is highly appraised by all deeper thinking individuals in this country and elsewhere. More organized efforts are needed to provide opportunities and facilities for all desiring to study the languages of their choice. As retrospective statistical data show, Ukrainian (as well as other non-English and non-French languages) in Canada is in decline. Comparing, for instance, the percentage of Ukrainians speaking the mother tongue in 1951, viz. 89.2% of the total Ukrainian population, with that of 1961, it dropped

down to 76.4%. In other words, in the last decade approximately 13% of Canadians of Ukrainian origin lost command of their language, in most cases switching to English. This decline in language cultivation is to a great extent due to lack of interest and encouragement which could be achieved, once the languages receive some form of legal recognition and formal status. After all they are an integral part of the Canadian reality and form an important cultural asset, the nurturing of which should be a joint responsibility of us all. Another obstacle is the negative attitude generally prevailing in the Canadian mentality as far as studying languages is concerned. Such linguistic inertia does not create a conducive atmosphere for the study and mastering of languages; on the contrary, such state of affairs is most discouraging. As a result, people of various origins become monolingual, losing their original linguistic background and accepting only one of the official languages of Canada, mostly English.

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In conclusion, may it be emphasized once more, that this review has been only an attempt to present the contribution of Ukrainians to *Canada's Cultural Heritage*. More research and study will, without doubt, bring to light additional rich and more colorful hues, that after all, are a part of the pattern of Canadian life which we cherish very much and expect to be perpetuated by generations to come.

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